



Policy No. 113

Early Intervention Natural Environments

Adopted: November 16, 2001

The Developmental Disabilities Council supports the provision of early intervention services in natural environments. This is consistent with the Council's federal mandate to work toward the integration and inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all facets of community life (The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, PL 106-402). The Council supports the Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program (ITEIP), Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) in their implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C.

Early Intervention Services are defined in IDEA Part C as developmental services that "to the maximum extent appropriate, are provided in natural environments, including the home, and community setting in which children without disabilities participate."

In discussions of best practice in early intervention, "natural environments" is not just where early intervention services are provided but how they are provided as well. It means providing early intervention services as part of the routines and daily activities of infants and toddlers and their families, for example, bathtime, reading, mealtime, or playing.

The Council urges the legislature, Governor and state agencies to reaffirm the basic civil rights of all, including those with disabilities, and enforce IDEA, Part C. The Council urges ITEIP and other training and technical assistance providers to support the early intervention community in this change in early intervention practice.

The Council urges local early intervention service providers to "see with new eyes" the field of early intervention and its integration with the home and community lives of infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. The Council recognizes that some early intervention programs are providing services in natural environments.

The Council urges childcare and other community programs to welcome infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. The Council is working with state agencies and other organizations to increase the knowledge, skills, and support available for these service providers to better prepare them to provide inclusive programs.

The Council hopes families of infants and toddlers with disabilities will see themselves and their children as valued members of their communities.

Background Information:

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C requires early intervention services occur in natural environments.

DSHS/DDD receives federal funds to implement IDEA, Part C. The Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program administers these funds.

The DSHS application and contractual agreement must comply with this law.

Specific language in both the federal law and Washington State application for Federal funding and early intervention policies and procedures defines early intervention services as follows:

“Early intervention services means developmental services that to the maximum extent appropriate, must be provided in natural environments, including the home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate.”

The “natural environments” requirement has been in the law since 1986.

The issue has reached the current level of attention because of changes that occurred in the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA. The changes are:

“The provision of early intervention services for any infant or toddler occurs in a setting other than a natural environment, only when early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in a natural environment.”

“The Individualized Family Service Plan shall be in writing and contain a statement of the natural environments in which early intervention services shall appropriately be provided, including a justification of the extent, if any, to which the services will not be provided in natural environments.”

Implementing natural environments is a national issue and all states are working towards meeting compliance. The federal monitoring process has been modified to address states’ compliance with natural environments requirement.

Background information provided by the Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Department of Social and Health Services.

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